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TAGS: [TSPL](#) [EINV](#) [MO](#)  
SUBJECT: MOROCCO REQUESTS JOINT COMMITTEE TO ADVANCE  
SCIENCE AND TECH COOPERATION

¶1. (SBU) Summary: This is an Action Request. Please see Paragraph 7. Government of Morocco (GOM) officials told EconOff and visiting ESTH Regional Hub Officer on January 26 that Morocco would like to create a Joint Committee of U.S. and Moroccan officials to determine priority areas for collaboration under the newly approved U.S.-Morocco Science and Technology Agreement (S&T Agreement). GOM officials also proposed several areas for collaboration and requested Department assistance in identifying and contacting U.S. institutions. The Mission requests Department guidance in responding to GOM request to create a Joint Committee. End summary.

Now That It's Finally Official...

¶2. (SBU) Director for Technology Zayed El Majid, and Direction of Technology lead for bilateral cooperation Mohamed Benbouida, of the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education, Training, and Scientific Research (Ministry of Education) told us during a wide-ranging review of Moroccan science and technology interests that Morocco would like to see a Joint Committee established to bring momentum to the 2006 S&T Agreement. Although taken aback when EconOff informed them that the GOM had just approved the agreement in a December 26 Council of Ministers meeting, Majid and Benbouida both lamented that Moroccans' high expectations of increased S&T cooperation in the two years since the signing of the agreement had not come to fruition. They then presented their wish list of the type of cooperation that the GOM hopes might flow from the S&T Agreement.

¶3. (SBU) Morocco's first suggestion would be the establishment of a Joint Committee to oversee cooperation under the S&T Agreement, Majid said. Other requests for assistance include expert guidance and assistance as the Ministry of Education seeks to restructure Morocco's research and development (R&D) infrastructure and institutions, workshops or conferences to promote exchanges between researchers and the private sector (including U.S. multinational firms), technical assistance to Moroccan research laboratories including help meeting international safety and security standards, and regionally targeted programs for National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded projects to boost research capacity in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region.

Moroccan Ideas for Cooperation

¶4. (SBU) Econoff and ESTHoff undertook to convey Majid's suggestion regarding a Joint Committee to the Department, and pointed out that such a committee could be most effective if it defined a few target areas for collaboration. Majid observed that several of the GOM's national research priorities may also interest U.S. institutions, highlighting fields that fall under the S&T Agreement priority areas, including renewable energy, environmental protection and management, fisheries management, agricultural research, and commercialization of research. In particular, Majid stated, Morocco boasts world-class natural resources and biodiversity, including argan nut trees, cork trees, cedar forests, and medicinal and aromatic plants. U.S. companies may be interested in joint R&D for commercialization of products derived from Morocco's natural resources, he suggested. However, Morocco has little expertise in partnership between researchers and the private sector, and would benefit from sharing of U.S. experience in financing mechanisms for research, attracting private capital, and structuring partnerships.

¶5. (SBU) Abdelouahid Ezzarfi of the Direction of Technology told EconOff that the Ministry of Education, as part of its evaluation of Morocco's R&D sector, has benefited from USG assistance in the form of Financial Services Volunteer Corps (FSVC) evaluations of Morocco's climate for venture capital-type investment. The Ministry of Education is awaiting a report from the FSVC on benchmarks to assist in guiding policies favorable to R&D commercialization. However, the Ministry is also seeking input on methodologies for a broader evaluation of the effectiveness of its national R&D sector. Ezzarfi asked if the U.S. has any institutions

or organizations with expertise in evaluating R&D strategies, plans, priorities, and outcomes, noting his interest in corresponding with any groups with such expertise.

¶6. (SBU) In a separate meeting, ESTHoff briefed the Charge on a proposal to establish a Year of Arab-American Science Partnership (AASP), using the positive but under-developed relationships and potential in scientific and technological research to strengthen bilateral ties and promote development and innovation. Although the GOM recognizes the need to promote domestic R&D, spending remains relatively low at 0.7 percent of GDP, and Morocco would benefit from research collaboration and assistance in strengthening scientific research, and particularly in commercialization of research. A focused science diplomacy program with societal and economic benefits would promote the U.S. image and interests in Morocco, aligning neatly with existing USG and GOM development goals.

What Next?  
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¶7. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: The Mission requests Department's guidance in responding to the GOM suggestion that we establish a Joint Committee. Post recommends that we provide a positive outline of recommended steps building up to creation of such a committee, and would welcome further input and visitors from relevant offices and agencies to flesh out these ideas. Post also requests assistance from OES/STC regarding the existence of USG or non-governmental institutions that have expertise in evaluation of R&D sectors, and the possibility of facilitating contact between such organizations and the Moroccan Ministry of Education. Post also welcomes the proposal for an S&T diplomacy push like the AASP, and looks forward to more information as this idea develops further.

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